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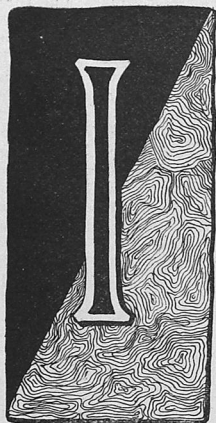
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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.



STILL LIFE IN WATER COLORS.

BY EMMA HAYWOOD.

PROMISED in my last chapter on this subject to give, as far as possible, hints that might be useful in the actual carrying out of the work of painting from still life. All preparatory measures have been fully discussed; it now only remains to treat of the methods employed. It would be absurd to restrict the student too much by the laying down of arbitrary rules which do not, and cannot hold good unreservedly when painting from Nature. Remember that Nature alone is after all our

best guide and instructor, if we will sit at her feet in all humility and earnestness of spirit and learn of her.

I have suggested that instead of starting on a large group, it will be wise to make some separate studies from still life by way of practice; this will undoubtedly be a saving of time in the end.

Take, for instance, a couple of apples, place them in position according to instructions given in the last month's issue of this journal, get as much variety of color and form in the manner of placing as possible and bring one of the apples into much greater prominence than the other; let the one retiring from view be partly obscured by that in front of it, so that its outline is cut and it receives a cast shadow which will be found of great value for effect. The green gray shade of the triangular stand on which to arrange your subject, described in my last chapter, will serve admirably for a background. Now make a careful drawing of your study. This can be done first in charcoal roughly, and afterwards when the forms are well defined can be gone over with a fine pointed lead-pencil, (not too hard). The charcoal can then be beaten out with a clean rag, or better still, a piece of wash leather. It may be of use to mention here that charcoal works best when cut to a chisel-shaped edge; in this way it gives a clearer line and is much more economical than when pointed as it does not require such constant sharpening nor does it break away in the process.

The outline drawing completed to your satisfaction, proceed to boldly block in the darkest shadows squarely and definitely, at the same time carefully preserving their form, for remember you must continue to DRAW from first to last. Every stroke of the brush should have a meaning and intention. The darkest shadows should be rich and warm in tone; they will become cooler and grayer as they advance toward the light.

Frequently regard your model with half-closed eyes; this will help you to detect the reflected lights which are invaluable for giving roundness and solidity. You will never find that the darkest part of a shadow is carried to the extreme edge of a round object, if you paint it so it will have the appearance of being cut out and pasted on the background. Exactly the same rule applies to the bright side, the highest light is never found at the extreme edge of any object however much it may appear so at the first glance. If my readers have studied from the round in black and white, they will have been educated in certain laws which govern the effects of light and shade, and they will now find the knowledge thus acquired of the greatest use to them, for to learn these laws for the first time when using color is confusing inasmuch as the exact relations of light and shade are not so easily perceptible in a colored object unless the eye has been trained to note and appreciate them at their proper value. When the dark shadows are put in, allow them to dry thoroughly before putting on the next wash. In a moderately warm room this will not take long. Paint with a full brush and do not trouble to soften the edges too much in the beginning; that will come in the working up, for at this stage a finished appearance is not to be thought of. It is imperative to paint with a full brush in order to make the washes wet enough, unless painted freely in this way they will lack that transparency which is the chief charm of water color painting. I should also advise students to acquire the habit of using brushes as large as possible, if properly pointed they will be found quite under control and possess the advantage of holding a great deal of color which facilitates the laying in of a flat clear wash. While the first shadows are drying it will be a good opportunity to float in the back ground. Mix sufficient of a tint as near the color you wish to imitate as possible; if you can secure the general tone in one painting so much the better. It will be found easier to obtain a flat wash if you take the paint-

ing off the easel and place it on the table at a slight inclination. To cover a given space so that it presents a good even surface when dry, requires a little practice, but be not discouraged if not as even as desirable in the first instance, it is simple enough to fill in, eradicate, or strengthen, as the case may suggest after the first tint has been allowed to dry. Never on any account try to make any alterations while the color is still wet—this will only make matters worse.

Be sure you have enough color mixed before starting. Begin at the top and carry the color across, using it freely enough to continue the work without showing any brush marks; when nearing the outlines of your subject be careful to carry the color round them so that it does not have a hard edge, showing darker than the rest, this operation is not difficult but needs a little practice. If you put this tint in wet enough, your paper will be pretty sure to cockle; but as it dries will contract again as before. When dry, replace the work on your easel, and proceed to put in the half shadows and the tones that break into the highest lights. In doing this do not be led away by your abstract knowledge of the local coloring of the object before you, as a matter of fact the actual local coloring does not play a very prominent part. What you need to study and endeavor to portray is the coloring represented by the action of light and shade. We know a field of grass to be absolutely green, yet so painted it would have a very disagreeable effect. Now when your paper is fairly covered, and the relative tones and the contrasts of light and shade are well represented proceed to finish up. Do this by endeavoring to further model and improve the drawing in detail and almost imperceptibly your work will assume true finish. It is a mistake to suppose that finish consists in the production of a smooth and even surface, rather does it follow on a proper disposition of form, light, shade and color. No two artists work alike: just as handwriting differs, so does the touch of the brush, hence arises individuality of style. The basis of success is correctness of perception aided by skillful draughtsmanship. Do not attempt a group until you can execute separate studies with some degree of facility.

Let the study of apples be followed by a bunch of grapes, a branch of plums, a vase, anything that comes in your way; if the above mentioned are not obtainable there are plenty of humbler subjects that will be quite as improving, for instance a common cabbage makes an excellent study, two or three carrots, a basket of eggs, an old earthenware jug, and many more such familiar objects form an endless range to choose from. When at last you make up your mind to begin something that might be called a picture, be sure that before commencing you form a distinct idea of that which is to form the center of interest, then let all your efforts be directed to focusing the attention of the spectator on that particular point. The interest must not be divided; nothing detracts so much from the worth of a picture as an uneasy sense of not knowing what to look at first—accessories must be kept in their proper place; their mission is to heighten effect not to draw attention to themselves.

There has of late years been a great change in the method of treating water colors, they no longer look weak by the side of oils as in the days gone by when it was the fashion to work them up gradually by means of faint washes. The modern school teaches a bold, free, strong style far more realistic and telling in effect. The key-note of the picture is struck at once by putting in the darkest shadows and leaving the highest lights. In this manner a solidity is gained almost if not quite equal to that attainable in oils, while at the same time the transparency which is the peculiar charm of water colors, is not only preserved, but is still more apparent in a strongly painted picture treated as described. There are of course many veteran water color painters who cling to the traditions of their youth, and many of their paintings are both beautiful and interesting as works of art, but there can be no question nevertheless, that the weak washy style they advocate has fallen into disfavor and is fast dying out. I shall endeavor in my next chapter on water colors to give some hints that may be useful in figure painting, the most ambitious of all studies for which, however, practice in still life is an excellent preparation.

